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'I'm not your mother.' British Social Realism, neoliberalism and the maternal subject in Sally Wainwright's *Happy Valley* (BBC 2014-16)

A very British tradition

The history of the realist tradition in British cinema ..., becomes the history of the changing conceptualization of the relation between the public and the private, the political and the personal, the state and the citizen. (Higson 1995: 193)

This claim by Andrew Higson, that a particular tradition of British cinema (and television), usually termed British social realism¹, both charts and can be identified with shifting conceptualizations of British national identity, is one that is familiar². It is embodied above all in accounts of the British New Wave films of the 1960s, films whose response to the social transformations of post-war Britain constituted both 'a break with and a renewal of the British realist tradition' (Higson 1986: 90). They emerged out of the renewed interest in documentary as a politically progressive form that produced the Free Cinema movement of the 1950s, and were largely adaptations of the cycle of plays and novels on working-class subjects - the plays of the 'Angry Young Men', and the novels of Northern writers such as Alan Sillitoe, Stan Barstow and David Storey – that appeared at the end of the 1950s. In all of these, concern for traditional working-class communities was combined with an uneasy sense that postwar affluence threatened their cohesion and masked the alienation of a younger generation from 'the political decision-making processes of society' (Higson 1995: 270). The films, with their discontented young male working-class heroes, thus articulated a new tension between the elements – public/private, political/personal, state/citizen - that comprise Higson's definition, and did so through a new combination of their cinematic modes: the public focus of documentary and the personal trajectory of narrative fiction. The formal and thematic components of the New Wave films establish a tradition of British film and television production that becomes the privileged signifier for shifting ideas of British national identity.

What, then, are the cinematic conventions established here? They have been much described³, and I am going to focus here on three, using as my exemplar John Schlesinger's *A Kind of Loving* (1962), adapted from the 1960 novel by Stan Barstow. Schlesinger was not one of the New Wave directors who began their directorial careers in Free Cinema, but, as Charles Barr points out (1986: 218), his background was equally rooted in documentary: he had served a filmmaking apprenticeship with British Transport Films, inheritors of the Griersonian tradition, before moving to television arts documentaries. Most notably, then, there is the use of place *as place* rather than simply setting for narrative action (Lay 2002: 62-3). The film's opening sequence shows characteristic Northern terraced streets opening onto waste ground where children play. Washing hangs on lines, and a wedding is sufficient excitement to produce watching crowds of mainly middle-aged women. Repeated sequences of shots linger on streets, railway, canal, allotments. These are places marked by class – the terraced house of Vic's working-class family is a long bus ride away from Ingrid's mother's newer semi - but also by gender. Outside space, the allotment and the railway bridge, belong to men, whilst the house is the domain of women, and in particular of mothers. Children – boys - play here, in the streets, but their movements are contained and circular.

Second there is the constant movement of the protagonist, Vic, and the way the sometimes hand-held camera tracks that motion. In a series of sequences we see him cross the town's spaces, always running, with the camera panning quickly to catch this movement, so that factory, terraces, and cobbled streets become places he leaves behind. For John Hill (1986: 130), these sequences are simply another way of displaying place, but Vic is equally out-of-place in the film's interior, domestic spaces: his presence is disturbing, always restless, barely contained.

Finally, there is the space Vic runs towards. This is what Higson, borrowing from a contemporary critic, has famously called 'That Long Shot of Our Town from That Hill' (1984: 13). Vic's, like those of the other New Wave protagonists, is a narrative of desired escape, and 'That Long Shot ...' positions us, with the

protagonist, above the city, looking down on a townscape which, with distance, has become beautiful. Both Higson and Hill (1986: 158) have pointed out the ambivalence in this shot. Its perspective is that of a distanced observer, one who *has* escaped - we are 'outside and above the city' writes Higson (1984: 13) - but it also signals the impossibility of Vic's own escape. In that final shot he is with the woman who will ensure his return to the town below.

These landscapes, of course, draw on an existing tradition of British filmmaking. Terry Lovell (1990: 359) points to the way in which films of the 1930s echoed the concerns of J. B. Priestley's *English Journey* (1934), in which a bleak, brutal but heroic industrial Britain was seen as being replaced by an England of 'giant cinemas and dance-halls and cafés' (1984: 300). Carol Reed's *The Stars Look Down* of 1939⁴ centres on precisely this opposition, with montage sequences which echo those of the Grierson documentaries, and location shots of cobbled streets and narrow rows of terraced houses that will recur in the New Wave films. But the landscapes of *A Kind of Loving* also point forwards. Its townscape will appear often: in film – we might think of *Brassed Off* (1996) and *The Full Monty* (1997) from the 1990s, *Billy Elliot* (2000) or *This is England* (2006) from the following decade - and perhaps more importantly, in television. Here, it became the setting for *Coronation Street* (1960-), the soap opera whose early episodes, as Lovell notes (ibid.: 361) share many of the narrative elements of the New Wave films; for the community based police series, *Z-Cars* (1962-78) and its successors; and later for more 'authored' series like *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1982)⁵ whose portrait of Thatcher's Britain made it into a political as well as a televisual event (Paterson 1987:228)⁶.

The cultural moment articulated in *A Kind of Loving* and the other New Wave films is one 'most strikingly and decisively marked', as Richard Dyer (1981: 2) and others⁷ have noted, by Richard Hoggart's hugely influential book *The Uses of Literacy* (1957). Hoggart drew on his own childhood experience to depict the traditional Northern working-class community of his memories – a 'landscape with figures – a setting' is how he describes it - and its transformation, or debasement, by the effects of increased affluence and the 'shiny barbarism'

(1958: 193) of mass culture. It was Hoggart's book that furnished the characters and settings of *Coronation Street*, as Dyer (1981) demonstrates, and that influenced the representations of class, place and culture in the New Wave films (Hill 1986, Barr 1986). Along with books by Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson, Hoggart's book became one of the foundational texts of British Cultural Studies (Hall 1980).

In some ways, then, as the brief history I have traced would suggest, the claim by Higson with which I began would seem justified. But mulling over what is - nevertheless - wrong with it, Charlotte Brunsdon (2000) notes that its equation of a particular tradition of British cinema (and television) with shifting conceptualizations of British national identity not only *does* not include women in its history - its 'private' and 'personal' refer to the 'individual desires' and 'personal relations' of the films' male protagonists (1995: 270); its 'citizen' is envisaged as male. It *cannot*. Writing of films by women directors during the 1990s, she comments that, even though they share many of the characteristics of 'British social realism', 'it may be more difficult' to think of *these* films as representations 'of the nation' because 'there are real equivocations in the fit between being a woman and representing Britishness' (2000: 169-70).

The reasons for this become clear if we return to the New Wave films of the 1960s, and in particular to Lovell's (1990) analysis of them. The *viewer* of the town from 'that hill' is, she comments, 'Hoggart's scholarship boy: the adult working-class male looking back with nostalgia at a remembered childhood landscape' (1990: 370). It is his surrogate - the 'fantasy projection of the self he might have become' had he stayed (ibid.) - who acts, who moves, and through whose eyes the story is told. Women, or *mothers* - all the women in these 1960s films are characterized through their maternal role, whether lived, refused or imminent - are part of, identified with, the 'landscape' or 'setting' (Hoggart 1958). For Hoggart, 'our mam', warm, ageless, shapeless, and eternally holding things together, *is* home: a 'turned-in-upon-itself world into which nothing which does not concern the family penetrates' (1958: 42). Even in the soap opera *Coronation Street*, comments Lovell, where middle-aged women have key roles,

'Our Mam' is 'a stolid and immobile figure': more often the background for stories than their protagonist (1990: 364). In the films, however, maternity is also presented in its threatening, monstrous aspect. It is the daughters of single mothers who entrap the protagonist, and who themselves embody the threat of maternity which will restrict the restless male subject to immobility and staying-in-place.

This is a move that is even more evident when we look forward to the 1980s and *Boys from the Blackstuff* (1982). Here, in an indictment of the hopelessness of Thatcher's Britain, there are no 'long shots from that hill'. Instead, the unemployed men walk in circles, through terraced streets now strewn with rubbish, and the camera looks down on them, pinning them in place. Children no longer run in the streets but trail listlessly behind the male protagonist. In a key shot from the penultimate episode we see Yosser Hughes, the series' 'tragic working-class hero' (Lusted 1984: 41), sitting on a bench in an empty, vandalised town centre. As the camera pulls away, the aerial shot frames him as a tiny, lost, immobile figure, trapped within a series of rectangular frames. In this series, 'our mam' is a residual figure, almost entirely absent. Instead, the women *merely* entrap or undermine⁸: in the home, like Yosser's wife or, slightly more sympathetically, Chrissie's; or in their new roles in the public sphere, where they echo 'Thatcher the milk snatcher'⁹ as health visitors, social workers, psychiatrists or benefit fraud officers. It is a series, as critics have noted, steeped in nostalgia for a lost working-class male community. But key to that nostalgia is the loss of woman as home.

Woman as home, woman as subject

To describe it in this way is already to link this perspective with psychoanalytically inflected accounts of the maternal. For Freud, famously, woman *was* home: the 'former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, ... the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning' (2001: 245). This made her at once object of nostalgic longing for Freud's male subject and figure of 'dread and horror'¹⁰ (ibid.: 219). Luce Irigaray, for whom psychoanalysis is merely the latest incarnation of a long Western philosophical tradition, articulates this as: 'as a

mother, woman represents *place* for man', ... *a thing*'. She functions as '*envelope*, ... *container*, ... starting point' (2004: 11, original emphasis), enabling the production of masculine subjectivity, ideas, stories. As place, she therefore *has* no place; she is 'assigned to be place without occupying a place' (ibid.: 45); insofar as this attributes to her the power of suffocation as well as of comfort, and an absence of identity, she is also 'threatening primitive chaos' (ibid.: 77). For Soviet semiotician Jurij Lotman, this gendered structure is at the heart of the origins of plot. In the stories of myth, he writes, the sequence of events 'can be reduced to a chain: entry into closed space - emergence from it'. This 'closed space' is to be 'interpreted as "a cave," "the grave," "a house," "woman"'; entry into it means 'death', 'conception', or 'return home' (1979: 168).

This is, however, more than philosophical, psychoanalytic, or semiotic abstraction. In her recent exploration of the difficulties in conceiving of a maternal *subject*, Alison Stone argues that as 'prevailing assumptions' such gendered theories of the self have been 'embodied in our forms of social life – our *social imaginary*'¹¹ (2012: 11, original emphasis):

We are dealing, then, with assumptions and imagery: not logically coherent arguments but a web of associations and pictures concerning the maternal figure – associations that can be highly tenacious, to which we can be deeply attached without realizing it. Within this web, the mother is a bodily figure ... the figure whom one must leave behind, and hence ... the background to the selfhood of others but not herself a self or ... a subject. (ibid)

Above all, it can be argued, they are embedded in narrative. It is through narrative, argue Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson, 'that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world ... [A]ll of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple and changing) by locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making*' (1994: 58-9, original emphasis). Addressing more specifically the structures of power in contemporary late capitalist societies, Lois McNay makes a similar argument: that the entrenched nature of narratives of gender makes them 'foundational' in constructing our sense of a coherent identity. Despite globalizing and

‘detraditionalizing’ changes in economic and social structures, we continue to invest in them both discursively – through the stories we tell of ourselves – and ontologically, in the way we live our lives. Both our lives and our self-understanding, she writes, ‘are shaped within the parameters suggested by culturally sanctioned meta-narratives’ (2000: 93).

Quite what this means for the lives and self-understandings of *mothers* in contemporary ‘Euroamerican’¹² societies is explored by Steph Lawler, in her empirical study of the narratives through which mothers make sense of their own difficult relationship to selfhood, or subjectivity. Extending McNay’s arguments, she too writes of the power of these structuring narratives, and of their reproduction and renewal within political discourses and social practices, as well as the personal narratives and maternal practices of mothers themselves. Within such discourses, she writes, the mother – never, in Stone’s words, ‘herself a self’ – is nevertheless responsible for the production of the selves of others: her task ‘is to produce the good, well-managed self’, which will uphold the ‘liberal [democratic] order’ (2000: 2). What both ‘progressive’ and ‘conservative’ political discourses have shared, she argues, is ‘an emphasis on the family as guarantor of social order’. Thus mothers bear the ultimate responsibility for producing not only the ‘good self’ of the child but also the ‘good society’ (ibid.: 39). Returning briefly to the tradition of British social realism and its relation to concepts of national identity, then, the difficulties that Brunsdon identifies in ‘the staging of female experience’ (2000: 168) within it are hardly surprising. ‘Our mam’, as imaginary presence or (perpetually) lost object of nostalgic longing, has acted as guarantor of that tradition; as landscape, room, house, hearth, city (Freud 1973), she secures the tradition which Higson sees as framing shifting ideas of British national identity. But she does this only on condition that she does not become a subject.

Threatening the social order

‘Bad’ mothers, primarily working-class and single mothers, writes Lawler, are seen as failing to adequately nurture these good selves. In so doing, they are ‘deemed excessive, repulsive, threatening’; their failure in turn threatens the

social order (2000: 2). It is an analysis that received striking confirmation in the dominant political discourses within the UK of 2010 onwards. Sara de Benedictus (2012) has tracked these discourses as they appeared within public political statements, news reports and social media campaigns and comments. She begins with a speech by prime minister David Cameron following the summer riots of 2011, reportedly 'the worst bout of civil unrest in a generation' (Guardian/LSE 2011: 1):

The question people asked over and over again last week was "where are the parents? Why aren't they keeping the rioting kids indoors?" ...Families matter. I don't doubt that many of the rioters out last week have no father at home. Perhaps they come from one of the neighbourhoods where it's standard for children to have a mum and not a dad... where it's normal for young men to grow up without a role model, looking to the street for their father figures, filled with rage and anger. So if we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start. (Cameron, in De Benedictus 2012: 1)

A subsequent report from the influential right-wing think-tank, The Centre for Social Justice, 'Fractured Families: Why Stability Matters' (2013), unsurprisingly confirmed the links Cameron was making. The 'breakdown and volatility gripping neighbourhoods', particularly in 'our poorest communities', it asserted, were directly attributable to the 'throngs' of women 'raising children more or less singlehandedly' (2013: 3). 'Bad' mothers, it is clear, are responsible for producing our 'broken society', and they have done so, says the report, as a matter of 'personal family choice' (ibid.: 4). As de Benedictus argues, the 'public narrative of austerity' so dominant during the Cameron government served to intensify the neoliberal emphasis on individual parental responsibility. Parents, she writes, were now required 'to replace state support and build localities with an entrepreneurial spirit, boost the economy through labouring and caring for future generations: simultaneously ensuring that their children do this also without financially "burdening" the state' (2012: 6). Failing to do this, and failing because of 'lifestyle choice', 'lone mothers' are seen to deprive children 'of a "normal" upbringing through a lack of the nuclear family' and of the father as

role-model (ibid.: 12). The result can only be social breakdown and decay.

Implicit in these discourses is a contradictory appeal both to conservative notions of the patriarchal family, in which 'our mam' remains the warm, selfless centre of the 'respectable' working-class family (Skeggs 1997: 2-3), one which can be governed and controlled, *and* to a neoliberal ethic that positions the individualised subject as responsible for their own life outcomes. 'Bad' mothers, that is, have not simply failed but have actively *chosen* not to hold the (patriarchal) family together, and are thus individually responsible for both their own poverty and society's breakdown. In a central paradox of contemporary 'gendered neoliberalism' (Gill 2017: 611), today's mothers, we are told, must exercise *choice* in abandoning their selfhood.

***Happy Valley* (BBC1, 2014-16)**

It was at the height of the Cameron government's discursive dominance that the first series of *Happy Valley* was produced. Its two series follow police sergeant Catherine Cawood as, in interlinked narratives, she carries out her local policing role in West Yorkshire's Calder Valley, interacts with family and community, participates in major investigations, and tracks and punishes Tommy Lee Royce, the man who raped her daughter, Becky, and caused Becky's suicide.

Happy Valley carries all the hallmarks of British social realism: the bleak Northern landscape; the aerial shots of the town into which the camera then takes us; the circular journeys; the shots of canals, terraced streets, allotment, pub, children's playground; and the visit to the nearby countryside and 'that long shot', which enables us, with the protagonist, to look down on the town below. Critics emphasized its 'realness', its 'gritty', 'understated' quality¹³. But the series is 'authored' by Sally Wainwright, whose television writing has centred on complex Northern women and their relationships, most notably in *Unforgiven* (2009), *Scott and Bailey* (2011-16) and *Last Tango in Halifax* (2012-16) – though like two of her lead actors, Suranne Jones and Sarah Lancashire, she began with *Coronation Street*¹⁴. In the case of *Happy Valley*, Wainwright not only acted as creator, writer and executive producer, but also directed five of the twelve episodes¹⁵. Writing

about the series, Kristyn Gorton argues that it ‘puts women centre stage’, and in so doing it ‘expands the genre [of British social realism] and gives it a female voice’ (2016: 73). I want to argue, however, that it does more. By placing at its centre an active, articulate, mobile and angry maternal *subject*, it radically contests both a tradition of British social realism rooted in male nostalgia and the neoliberal narratives of maternal guilt and lifestyle choice that formed the discursive context of its production. It does this through a more fundamental contestation: of the wider cultural narratives about selfhood and the maternal that underpin both.

The opening episode begins with an aerial view of Sowerby Bridge, in the upper Calder valley, with its railway viaduct and terraced streets, and its church and the hills of the southern Yorkshire Dales in the background.

Fig. 1. The opening shot of Sowerby Bridge

The camera then takes us down, to follow a police car as it draws up outside a newsagent’s shop. Now we are close, the hand-held camera following Catherine as she borrows a fire extinguisher from the newsagent, and then lifts it from the car at a children’s playground. Another aerial shot shows us the playground and surrounding streets, before we return to Catherine and her encounter with ‘Liam Hughes, 23, unemployed, smackhead’, who, drunk, has doused himself in petrol at the top of a child’s climbing frame, and is threatening to set himself alight - to an audience of young mothers with pushchairs, a pair of middle-aged women, and a group of cheering, equally drunk youths. Catherine introduces herself, to Liam and to us:

I’m Catherine by the way. I’m 47; I’m divorced. I live with me sister who’s a recovering heroin addict. I have two grown up children: one dead, one who doesn’t speak to me, and a grandson. So ..

Intrigued, Hughes asks, ‘Why? Why doesn’t he speak to you?’ ‘It’s complicated. Let’s talk about you’, she replies, and we cut to the credit sequence, with its vertically split frames of aerial shots of the valley, highrise flats, canal and terraced houses, close-up glimpses of Catherine putting on her uniform, and full frame shot of the rolling clouds across the valley. Finally, a horizontally split screen shows us

Catherine's face in profile, and above it 'Written and created by Sally Wainwright', with a cat curled, watching, on a stone wall behind.

These opening four minutes, then, repay some attention. They establish, as Gorton has written (2016: 80), an emphatic Northern-ness, carried through accent and delivery as much as through the visual signifiers of place. In the shots of gossiping middle-aged women, young mothers with children in pushchairs, and unemployed young men we can find echoes of both the New Wave films – a threatened suicide has now replaced the wedding as object of spectacle – and of their successors in the 'authored' television of the 1980s, with its bleak visions of male unemployment. But that downward swoop of the camera also recalls *Coronation Street*, whose first episode began with just such a descent into the corner shop below, and which has a very similar railway viaduct. It is an echo which is cemented with the final shot, whose cat must surely remind us of the one which, in over fifty years of the soap opera's credit sequences, has stretched sensuously on just such a wall. These echoes alert us to the fact that this will be no standard social realist text. Its familiar emphasis on place and urban poverty will be shot through with an emotional intensity and a female-centred humour more familiar from soap opera, and later shockingly interrupted by flashes of gothic surrealism, as Catherine experiences flashbacks to the discovery of her daughter's body¹⁶. Most notably, our focus is not, now, on the unemployed young men, or on the women of the corner shop, but on the figure of Catherine. It is she who carries the opening's action and movement, and who defines the situation for us – 'We've got a high ranking, highly trained specialist expert police negotiator on his way over from Wakefield', she says drily. 'Basically it's you and me kid' – and she is the one who is, emphatically, in control.

'Wasted lives'

'Instead of trying to dish the dirt on one poor misguided, misinformed numpty ... write the big article ... about why so much of it goes on around here. ... Drugs. Wasted lives.'

Catherine's world, then, is one familiar to us from the British social realist tradition. Above all it recalls the world of *Boys from the Blackstuff*, with its portrait of urban deprivation and unemployment, and sense of wasted lives and lost futures. Here, too, the journeys are circular, within a postindustrial town in which a legacy of poverty and exploitation has resulted in a cut-off world whose heavy architecture seems to bear down on its people. Always visible beyond, the hills surrounding it do not offer the fantasy of escape that they did to the protagonists of the New Wave films. When in the second series the young hill farmer Daryl and his mother sit on a wall looking down on the town below, it is a prelude to his death and her attempted suicide; when guilty detective John Wadsworth seeks escape on the moors, he meets only more failure and an inevitable return to the town.

Happy Valley's is a world that has become more toxic, its lives more wasted than those of earlier representations. Its 'wasted lives' – Catherine's words to her journalist ex-husband - result not only from unemployment but from drugs, and in the second series from sexual trafficking. These lives, however, are not the result of a specific national government policy, as was the charge in *Boys from the Blackstuff*, or later *Brassed Off*. Neither, as we can see in Catherine's speech above, are they an outcome of individual choice, as the discourse of Cameron's conservatism would claim. Instead, they are the by-products of globalised *business*. The invisible figures at the centre of the international drugs chain that Catherine uncovers, with its multi-million pound UK distribution network, are invisible and 'untouchable'; above all, they are 'perfectly respectable'. Its central players corrupt both senior figures in the police force and local politicians, and they exploit the unemployed young men who are the object of Catherine's day-to-day policing: 'Every day we have to deal with kids, off their heads on whatever they can find to inject themselves with', she says, 'and it never stops. Just never stops.' Their origins, however, are neither local nor national. This is neoliberalism at work, according to the terms of Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff's description: operating through 'global actors', it is, they write, 'a mode of political and economic rationality characterized by privatization, deregulation and a rolling back and withdrawal of the state', in which 'market exchange'

becomes 'a guide to all human action' (2011: 5). The fate of small time dealer Ashley - a local entrepreneur who wins conservation grants for the restoration projects through which he transports the drugs - illustrates both the reach of these 'actors' and their ruthlessness. We see him coldly murdered in a drive-by shooting because he gives information to the police. If images of terraced streets and surrounding hills are recurrent in the series, then, in the montage sequences of shots of place that punctuate the action, so too are images of the telecommunication lines that connect this small Northern town with the movements of global capitalism beyond.

'Our mam'?

If her world seems familiar, the figure of Catherine herself is at once wholly familiar and radically new. She is of course 'our mam', the maternal figure who holds together both family and community in Hoggart's working-class Northern town. 'Catherine', says her sister Clare, 'would do anything for anybody'; she has, as Helen Piper has commented, a 'seemingly inexhaustible capacity for compassion' (2017: 190). Her self-introduction in the opening sequence is in terms of her familial relationships: she is sister, mother, and grandmother. And it is as a maternal figure that she manages her community police team, at once protective - 'I want you with your stab-proof vests on' - and morally stern: 'Whatever's going on in your heads, you treat people with the compassion and respect they deserve'. The values she both articulates and embodies, then, are in some ways those of Hoggart's 'old tradition' (1958: 40): the values of kinship and a community rooted in place and shared experience. But if this would seem to position her as a figure of class-based nostalgia, there are also crucial differences. First, Catherine's community is now multicultural and open, not the 'turned-in-upon-itself world' of Hoggart's description, and her sense of kinship extended and inclusive. Amongst the many women we see her nurture are a prostituted teenage girl and a young Croatian woman who has been trafficked. 'We're talking about a vulnerable nineteen-year-old', she says of the former, when an officer dismisses her as merely a prostitute; she takes the latter home when safe accommodation cannot be found. Even Frances can be included, the woman who, duped by Royce through the discourse of romance and echoing his words - 'You

deprived him of having a relationship with his child', she accuses Catherine - has sought to draw Ryan back to him. 'Frances', says Catherine, 'You're old enough to be his mother.... He's groomed you, ... a nice, kind, normal person'. Later, informing Frances of all the other 'fiancées' who have visited Royce in prison, she closes, gently, with 'You take care of yourself, OK'.

Second, and more important, if Catherine is the warm, nurturing mother of Hoggart's description, she is also the 'bad mother' described by Lawler and de Benedictus. She failed to produce her daughter as a 'good self', a 'good citizen' (Lawler 2000: 74): Becky was, says Catherine's son, Daniel, 'a loser ... off the rails'; 'she hung around with wasters and pillheads and bloody idiots'. Above all, Catherine failed to protect Becky from rape and then suicide. As a result, her family is now, in Cameron's terms, 'broken': headed by a 'lone mother', as a result, says her ex-husband, of the 'choice' she made to accept Ryan, the product of that rape; with a sister who is an addict, a son whose marriage also collapses in the course of the series, and a grandson who is in persistent trouble at school. When Catherine reprimands the young female recruit, Kirsten, for not standing up to a corrupt local councillor with 'I'm not your mother. ... Nobody bullies you. You're a police officer', she repeats the failure. Kirsten, stung by the rejection, and trying to prove her toughness, is killed by Becky's rapist.

Third, as her words to Kirsten suggest, unthinkable for 'our mam' Catherine is a powerful presence within the public sphere. To her team she is 'Brunhilda': as leader of her team she is mobile and physically strong; in pursuit of Tommy Lee Royce she is the hero who investigates and exacts retribution. She is thus both central to and disruptive of the male-centred power structures that so clearly operate in her community, as they do beyond it. Insofar as she performs the role of police-officer as figure of (maternal) compassion and moral rectitude she acts as their humanising support: it is she who must break the news of a death and warn vulnerable young prostitutes of their danger. Insofar as her actions are also a challenge to these structures, however, she subverts them and holds them to account. She rebukes her senior officers and ignores instructions when they conflict with her sense of right. In a very funny scene in the second series she

recalls her early days in the police force of the 1980s, the years of Thatcher's Britain (and *Boys from the Blackstuff*): 'Every day was a misogynist delight from start to finish. The best thing ... you didn't get a truncheon, if you were a woman. You got a handbag! ... Great! What're you going to do with that when someone's coming at you with an Uzi or a machete?' Armed now with a Taser, she manages to shoot an aggressor in the genitals: what can you expect, she says, 'if you're going to wave a baseball bat around in front of a woman who's just completed her Taser training'. Finally, insofar as Catherine embodies, speaks from, and acts upon loss, melancholia, and *anger*, she disrupts them.

For Catherine is not only a figure of 'seemingly inexhaustible... compassion'. She is also driven by *rage*. In a key scene from the first series, she visits her sister Clare at their allotment (that archetypally male space in earlier incarnations of British social realism). Catherine has been told of the release from prison of Tommy Lee Royce, and Clare is concerned that she will not 'deal with it objectively... rationally'. Catherine responds:

Rationally! I've no intentions of dealing with it rationally. I'm amazed you think anybody would expect me to. ... My *intention* is to deal with it effectively.

Fig. 2. 'My intention is ...'

The scene is shot largely in close-up, so that we can feel the force of Catherine's anger (and of Clare's fear). It is a framing that evokes the emotional intensity of soap opera, with its melodramatic heritage and specific address to a female audience imagined to be distracted, socially powerless, and maternal - 'a sort of ideal mother ... [someone] who has no demands or claims of her own' in Tania Modleski's well-known formulation (1984: 92). At the same time, however, if the human *subject*, as Robert Pippin argues, is defined by being 'a meaning-making subject, ... a self-conscious subject, in [an] active, determining relation to itself in all experience as well as in all action' (2005: 2, original emphasis), then Catherine embodies this definition here. Her decision *not* to act 'rationally' (by

leaving the punishment of Royce to formal policing structures), but instead to *act*, is a wholly intentional one, carrying the full weight of agency and subjectivity. It is also specifically maternal.

The maternal subject

'The mother' is ... the impossible subject, par excellence. (Baraitser 2009: 4)

Against the dominant ideological discourse of conservative Britain (and the nostalgia for a lost male-centred family and community of the British social realist tradition), then, Wainwright's series refuses the identification of social breakdown with maternal blame, and challenges normative constructions of 'good' motherhood. Cameron's argument – that being brought up in a female-headed household deprives a male child of a vital 'father-figure' and 'role-model' – is one that was endorsed by earlier incarnations of British social realism. Here, however, it is voiced by the pathologically violent and misogynist villain of the series, Tommy Lee Royce ('That's no life ... Not for a lad', he says of Ryan), a man whose self-pity ('I could have been someone') echoes that of Yossie Hughes, the 'tragic hero' of the 1980s *Boys from the Blackstuff* ('He always thought he was going to *be* somebody'), as it does that of other figures of tragic masculinity¹⁷. In fact, it is the fathers of conventional, male-headed nuclear families who bear ultimate responsibility for the series' brutal crimes, from Kevin and Ashley who plan the abduction of the first series to John Wadsworth in the second.

The series' maternal figures, in contrast, are fractured, compromised characters who carry the burden of a socially attributed guilt, but they are also heroic, compassionate and ethical, embodying a moral code which centres on community, an extended notion of kinship, and inclusivity. In one of the key scenes of the second series, we see Catherine visit a local hill farm, to discover a single mother, Alison, who has killed her son Daryl with a shotgun, before attempting suicide herself. Her son, the result of her own rape by her father, had confessed to the murders of prostitutes that have constituted the series' major investigation. As Catherine, compelled to arrest her, cradles the half-conscious Alison in her arms, we are drawn into a complex web of engagements which are

at once embodied, emotional, moral, and political. Both women are raising male children born of rape, a decision that has placed them outside conventional social and moral structures: both, as single mothers of failed 'selves', are 'bad' mothers. Both act according to a morality which disrupts, even as it remains nominally within, accepted (neoliberal, patriarchal) notions of justice. As Catherine holds Alison, we are invited to *feel* the network of identificatory relationships that bind them and the other women – mothers, daughters and sisters – in the series; but we are simultaneously offered an ethics, a mode of being, and a politics which contest those of the cultural moment in which the series was produced.

Fig.3. Catherine and Alison

Commenting on the narrative structures invoked by her interview subjects to explain their lives, Lawler argues that in a neoliberal culture, the self-as-hero 'becomes a project to be worked on', with the individualized 'true self' to be realized through this project (2000: 108-9). It is a project, however, that is unavailable to mothers. "'Mother", in its very definition, is a relational category', she argues, and represents a 'rupture' in selfhood (ibid.: 156-7, original italics). The women she interviewed struggled with this incompatibility, with 'the sheer impossibility of living out the subject positions' they were offered as mothers. It was only, she writes, 'by positioning themselves outside the signifier "mother" that [they were] easily able to assert a sense of themselves' (ibid.: 171, 156). For Lawler, the kind of 'revisioning of motherhood' that might make possible the idea of a *maternal subject* is difficult to envisage. It needs, she says, 'a politicization of ... [the concepts of] self and subjectivity'. There is no idealized space in which a 'true' relationship between mothers and daughters might be reclaimed, as the 'feminist romances' (Hirsch 1989) of the 1970s and 1980s imagined, but there *is* space for 'a refusal and a questioning of the ways in which we are positioned' (Lawler 2000: 172). Her rejection of utopian solutions in the face of what Stone describes as the tenacity of dominant 'assumptions and imagery' of the mother in the Western social imaginary is understandable, but there is at the same time a curious absence of agency in the solution she

proposes.

It is an absence that contrasts strongly with the fully intentional, maternal subject offered as hero in *Happy Valley*. Catherine is a figure who contests the individualization of neoliberalism, which the series identifies with the exploitation and 'wasted lives' with which she deals every day. But it does not, like the cinematic and televisual tradition on which it draws, set against this a nostalgia for a lost working-class, male-centred community, and the vision of woman/mother as home that underpins it. Instead, its central, complex maternal subject is enmeshed in (an extended notion of) family and community, with a narrative journey that is not towards the linear self-realization that Lawler describes, or towards the nostalgia or escape of her predecessors. Rather, it involves acceptance of an irrecoverable loss, anger and guilt as a crucial aspect of subjectivity ('mothering', as Alison Stone says, 'is pervaded by loss' (2012: 148)) and an ethics of compassion, female-centred kinship, and community that is at once rooted in place and inclusive of the marginalized and immigrant.

How, then, might we think about this figure in terms of available theorizations of subjectivity? The mother as subject, as Lisa Baraitser argues, 'seems to disappear from the many discourses that explicitly try to account for her' (2009: 4), and yet to recognize and theorize, as well as to *imagine* her seems increasingly important if we are to generate alternatives to neoliberal discourses of reflexive individualism (Tyler 2009: 4). One sustained attempt to do this is provided by Baraitser, whose model takes as its starting point that constructed by Christine Battersby in *The Phenomenal Woman* (1998). Battersby, setting out to produce a model of subjectivity which takes female rather than male as the norm, lists five features of that subject that mark it out as different from the male. These are natality (the potentiality to become two); relationships in which power-dependencies and inequalities are basic; a 'self' which emerges from the intersection of self and other; an identity which is embodied, 'fleshy'; and a 'monstrosity' which derives from a paradoxical entanglement (not opposition) between the embodied and the rational (1998: 8-11).

All of these characteristics, as Baraitser points out, relate to aspects of the maternal. All of them, I would argue, can be seen as embodied in Catherine. To Battersby's model, Baraitser adds a more general account of subjectivity as emerging not from continuity but from disruption: when 'disruption by the other shifts our internal psychic structures' (2009: 18), but when we embrace and are faithful to such disruption. The maternal¹⁸, which is characterized by unavoidable loss¹⁹ and disruption, thus becomes the site for the construction of a subjectivity which comes into being through this relationship. In so doing, it also embodies an ethics of relationality.

Conclusion: 'that hill'

In both series of *Happy Valley*, the final sequence sees Catherine climb 'that hill'. Here, however, its vantage point is linked to maternal loss: the hillside cemetery is where Catherine buried her daughter²⁰. In the first, she looks down on the town, and we see her replay the events of the series. Lifting her face to the sky and wind, she closes her eyes and smiles, before once more looking down at the town, her gaze this time conscious and focused. As we cut to a long shot, she turns and strides across the hill and out of shot. The sequence suggests understanding and acceptance, not escape, its interweaving of memory and landscape linking her, as Gorton suggests (2016: 82) to both place – this is where she is rooted - and hope.

Fig. 4. Catherine on 'that hill'

The end of the second series is less optimistic. It has focused less on mothers and daughters and more on mothers and sons, and the problems associated with masculinity remain intractable. The final sequence sees Catherine climb the hill with Clare, son Daniel, and grandson Ryan. The weather is wintry, and the music ominous. The scene is prefaced by Catherine's account to Clare of her meeting with Alison, the mother who killed her son, an account that is clearly also a self-description. Alison had brought him up and protected him, Catherine says, 'this child, this aberration, that she both loved and hated, because – what else could she do', but they had never spoken of his paternity because, said Alison, 'I never

had the language'. There is anger here in Catherine's shocking choice of words, as well as a shared pain, with echoes of feminist accounts of maternal ambivalence, such as those of Adrienne Rich (1977) or Rozsika Parker (1995, 1996). But as Catherine watches Ryan run ahead up the hill, the focus is squarely on her as a reflective subject, one that has achieved subjectivity *through* the processes of loss, sadness, anger, and, in Baraitser's words, a 'relation of obligation to an unassimilable otherness' (2009: 8).

Fig 5. Catherine as reflective subject

This specifically *maternal* subjectivity is impossible in conventional accounts of subject and nation. It cannot be made to stand in for ideas of British national identity. But it is this figure that in *Happy Valley* disturbs the familiar spaces of British social realism, and its underpinning assumptions, and that the series pits against the abject, guilty mother of the neoliberal imaginary.

Notes

¹ Higson actually distinguishes between what he calls 'the realist tradition' and the 'melodrama of everyday life', but the fusion that he points to between the 'documentary idea' of the 1930s and narrative cinema, a fusion which occurred in the 1940s, is more usually referred to as British social realism (Dave 2011, Lay 2002, Hallam and Marshment 2000).

² See for example Alan Lovell (1972), Higson (1986 and 1995), and Hill (1986, 1992, and 1999).

³ See for example, Higson (1984 and 1995), Hill (1986), Lay (2002).

⁴ Like the New Wave films, this was an adaptation of a contemporary novel, in this case A. J. Cronin's 1935 novel, described by Geoff Brown as '700 pages of social observation, plot clichés, and mine nationalisation propaganda'.

⁵ Alan Lovell gives a fuller catalogue, up to the 1980s, in his essay on 'The Context of British Social Drama' (1984).

⁶ In one exception to the male-centred nature of these narratives, when the 1990 adaptation of Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the Only Fruit* wants to show the 18 year-old Jess's joy at winning the scholarship that will secure her escape

from the insulated world of her mother, it repeats the spatial gesture of *A Kind of Loving*. Jess runs through the terraced streets of her Northern home town, and to the hill that gives her the power to look down on the world she is leaving. This is, however, emphatically a *daughter's* story, and like the male-centred narratives involves the rejection of mother as home.

⁷ See for example Barr (1986), Hill (1986), Lovell (1990).

⁸ In early accounts of the series, the claims by male writers that the series had cross-gender appeal (see in particular Richard Paterson's claim that it 'provided a narrative space which either sex could occupy' (1986: 226)), was fiercely contested by the angry review by Ruth Smith, the only female contributor to the 1984 BFI Dossier on the series.

⁹ As Education Minister between 1970 and 1974, Margaret Thatcher was responsible for the abolition of free school milk for the over-7s. The resulting nickname haunted her throughout her premiership. In 1985 she was reportedly refused an honorary degree from Oxford University because of her education cuts.

¹⁰ In her maternal aspect, woman is, writes Freud, *uncanny* (2001: 245).

¹¹ Charles Taylor defines 'social imaginary' as 'the ways people imagine their social existence, ... that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy', an understanding that is carried 'in images, stories, and legends' (2004: 23).

¹² She chooses this term, rather than 'Western', for its greater specificity.

¹³ 'Gritty' appears in almost all reviews, 'understated' and 'realness' in that of *The Guardian* of 10 February 2016.

¹⁴ Wainwright worked on *Coronation Street* for five years (see Anthony 2016).

¹⁵ Wainwright directed one episode in the first series, her first television directing, and four in the second.

¹⁶ In the second series the gothic elements are less disruptive, but are nonetheless there in the depiction of Frances Drummond, Ryan's teaching assistant, with her fantasized vision of Royce as innocent sufferer. This kind of *interruption* of realism (a 'perforated' or 'haunted' realism) has been identified by Patricia Ticineto Clough with a specifically female mode of writing. See Clough (1998), Thornham (2012), pp. 101-2.

¹⁷ Most notably, of course, that of Terry Molloy (Marlon Brando) in *On the Waterfront* (1954), whose words are then repeated by Jake la Motta (Robert de Niro) in *Raging Bull* (1980).

¹⁸ Baraitser interprets 'the maternal' very broadly, as encompassing those relations in which 'the adult takes on partial responsibility for the preservation of life, growth and the fostering of social responsibility for that other whom they name and claim as their child' (2009: 22).

¹⁹ Alison Stone writes of the way in which loss, sadness 'and the working-through of loss are integral to the maternal subject-position' (2012: 147ff.).

²⁰ In one of a number of literary references in the series, it is also, as the camera's pan to a neighbouring headstone shows us, where Ted Hughes buried Sylvia Plath.